

Standing Beside Them

"It is in vain, sir to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace--but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others take: but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" This quote, which is one of the most famous quotes in American history, defines, in a complicated way, the thoughts of most soldiers as they head off to the war. "Our brethren are already in the field!" That is what most soldiers must think when going to a foreign country. How scared they must be, how large the world must seem.

On a brilliant, pleasant weekend at a farm, I once shot a 4-10 rifle and hit a clay pigeon. As I pulled that trigger, my hands were shaking so badly they I couldn't see the end of the barrel. When I shot, a loud *crack* reverberated around the farm. A soldier must feel ten times worse when he fires. He is pointing his barrel not at a clay pigeon, but at the heart of another man. To pull the trigger, knowing that another person will fall. To watch that man fall on his knees and pray to God that he wouldn't die. To see him when he does. But most of all, to know you can't help. A soldier goes through all this hundreds of times over. It's amazing that that people wonder why some soldiers go insane. Finally, when the soldier comes home, there is no one to thank him. Think of how that must feel.

A soldier's life can be a lamentable one. But we can make that better. Put up signs. Wear red, white and blue in their honor. Most of all *stand beside them*. Even if you cannot shoot a gun, write to them and make them feel good. Remind them that they are doing this to save you. Tell them thanks. Any of those things can make a soldier colossally happy. Any of those things can make them proud to wear a camouflage suit. Any of those things makes a soldier feel like you are standing beside him.